

# Will Europe be the same after Iraq war?

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By Jonathan Power

This war won't leave the world as it found it. And this is true not only for the Muslim world but for Europe and America too. The irritations that seem a constant of American-European relations during the last few years have become almost a battle zone.

If the academic studies were not so convincing on the subject that democracies never go to war with each other one could perhaps imagine in the foreseeable future a state of armed hostilities between the rival camps. Certainly the common mood all over Western Europe is that we don't want to be part of the great transatlantic alliance anymore, if it means that every couple of years we have to follow America to war.

In the crucible of the preparations for war European citizens have forged their own common foreign policy. Europeans have never been so aware of their

common identity nor so conscious of what separates them from their old kissing cousins across the Atlantic — an abhorrence of war, the gun culture, brutal prison regimes, and capital punishment. Add to that the two codes of justice, one for the well-to-do and one for the poor. Ditto for the health services. Ditto for education.

All this has taken a long time to come to the surface. But the roots are deep. They go right back to the Iron and Steel Community, the precursor of the European Union, when France and Germany decided they must never go to war again and that the way to avoid it was to bind themselves economically together.

The debate over Iraq has crystallised this mood of Euro-solidarity, which if it had been left to mature on its own without outside stimulus might have taken a few more decades to solidify. And if the war goes wrong, triggering off great instability in the Middle East and adding new muscle to the depredations of Al Qaeda the

fault lines will deepen even further, and even more so if the U.S., confronting a chemical or biological attack, decides, as it has said it would, to use its nuclear weapons.

Indeed, resentment of American prowess now runs so deep that one can well imagine that a terrorist attack on Europe will unleash more anti-American feeling than anti-Arab. Not for nothing are polls showing all over Europe that the United States is regarded as the real rogue of our times.

Washington is sitting too comfortable with these developments. From the eye of the White House it looks as if "old" Europe is nicely divided with Britain and Spain on its side and out there is "new" Europe to the east more pro American than ever. But this is to assume the most optimistic scenario imaginable — that the war will go so smoothly that the kaleidoscope of Europe won't be re-shaken. The chances are the war will cause great upheavals and one senses that this is part of the fine

calculations being made in the Kremlin by Vladimir Putin.

It is only last year that observers were admiring the geo-political athleticism of President George Bush as he appeared to leap over Europe's head and embrace Putin. Europe seemed marginalised and a Russo-American condominium all too capable of calling the biggest shots. But it has not turned out this way. Contrary to expectations and in the face of last minute blandishments by Washington to set in motion a number of matters that favour Russia, Putin has turned towards the Franco-German axis, where many influential Russians from Mikhail Gorbachev on, with his talk of building "a common European house", have always felt Russia's interests lay.

What this means for the East Europeans who have rallied to Washington's cause is becoming clearer by the day. They may resent President Jacques Chirac's threat to stall their membership of the European

Union, but it is a serious threat and neither Washington, London nor Madrid can help them out of this hole they have dug for themselves. They have made a serious tactical mistake and one that could have deeper ramifications if prime ministers Jose Maria Aznar and Tony Blair lose their crowns in the days ahead.

Although public opinion in Spain is even more anti-war than it is in Britain it is Tony Blair who is the more vulnerable of the two. If the war goes wrong he will lose his premiership, whilst Aznar will just slide away as planned at the next election. In both countries whoever takes over will be far less pro-American and also more amenable to a common identity in European foreign policy. (And one that includes Russia more often than not.)

The process of creating a powerful single unified voice of Europe capable of speaking with great authority to the outside world, now in obedience because of the current splits,

will take a great leap forward. One can expect to see European encouragement to the American urge to wind down many of their bases in Western Europe, but also forestalling the simplistic American desire to move their bases into Eastern Europe.

The question is will Americans of influence, rather than ribbing Europe with accusations of playing Venus to America's Mars, realize that Europe is tough and strong enough to have its own valid point of view and it has come to these opinions out of strength not of weakness, out of perception, not ignorance?—Copyright Jonathan Power